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ABSTRACT

A study to ascertain state progress in building school-to-work systems reviewed the state applications for school-to-work planning grants submitted in December 1993 and 1993 state reports on progress toward achieving the National Education Goals. State infrastructure to support and guide local programs included clear goals, public understanding and support of school-to-work efforts, occupational and labor market information resources, skill standards, performance-based assessment tools, portable skill certificates, and evaluation mechanisms. Nearly every state had begun developing some elements of a state school-to-work system. System elements being addressed included occupational information systems, content and skill standards, performance-based assessments, portable skill certificates, and developing a statewide consensus. States with the most elements under development tended to be urban, industrialized states. States that reported the most progress developing the state infrastructure tended to be members of state coalitions. Many states struggled to create strong partnerships with business, industry, and labor. States identified the public's concern and lack of understanding of the goals and strategies of school-to-work programs as one of the most persistent barriers. The number and types of programs to facilitate school-to-work transition varied by state as well as the extent to which the state promotes or supports each model. (YLB)

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Issue Brief

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Developing Systems of School-to-Work Transition: A Report on State Progress

Introduction

An increasingly competitive global marketplace requires the development of a highly trained and productive workforce capable of propelling the U.S. economy into the twenty-first century. However, the United States is failing to prepare most new entrants to the workforce with skills equal to those of workers in Western Europe and the Pacific Rim — the nation's major competitors. In 1992, 3.4 million or 11 percent of all Americans ages sixteen to twenty-four had not completed high school and were not enrolled in any school. According to a 1991 Harris Poll, U.S. employers turned down five of every six young people who applied for a job largely because they were not qualified. In addition, American students continue to score below their peers in other developed nations in mathematics and science. For African Americans and Latinos, who will comprise an even greater percentage of the nation's workforce in the next century, the test results are even more discouraging.

Many leaders concur that to maintain both its preeminent position in the world and its current standard of living, the United States must improve the transition from school to work. Effective transition will help young people participate effectively in society and contribute productively to the economy.

With the passage of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 and the distribution of state planning grants, the federal government has embarked on an ambitious campaign to build on what states already have achieved in school reform and workforce development. The act presents a significant challenge to the nation's secondary and postsecondary education systems. In most instances, implementation of the reforms necessary to realize the goals of the act will take several years and will require a major shift in how Americans regard high school education. Meeting this challenge will require the ongoing support of parents, students, teachers, employers, and union leaders, as well as the collaboration of countless public and private entities at both the state and local levels. Developing a truly comprehensive and integrated system and sustaining it after the federal school-to-work grants are completed will require the creative, coordinated, and efficient use of federal, state, and local resources.

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To ascertain state progress in building school-to-work systems, staff of the National Governors' Association (NGA) reviewed the state applications for school-to-work planning grants submitted to the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education in December 1993 and the 1993 state reports on progress toward achieving the National Education Goals.[1] This review covers two aspects of school-to-work systems: state infrastructure to support and guide local programs and the types of local program models being incubated across the state. The results are summarized in Tables 1 and 2.

School-to-Work Framework

A consensus on the elements of school-to-work systems and the components of effective programs has emerged among reformers and policymakers interested in improving the linkages between school and work for young people. Core elements of this consensus as articulated in the federal legislation have been adopted by states in their planning grants. As is true of other aspects of education reform, states are responsible for providing the infrastructure to guide and support local programs, while permitting sufficient flexibility so that local programs can meet their diverse needs.

According to this view, states should develop the following system elements:

- clear goals;
- public understanding and support of school-to-work efforts;
- occupational and labor market information resources;
- skill standards;
- performance-based assessment tools;
- portable skill certificates; and
- evaluation mechanisms.

Operating under this system of state goals, standards, and assessments, local programs should reflect and accommodate the diverse needs and resources of communities and regions. Regional variations in available resources, existing programs, the types of industries, the number of growth industries, and the ability of employers to provide work experiences for youth require substantial accommodation to local circumstances.

However, for maximum effectiveness local programs must share certain common elements — some of which can be developed or supported at the state level. Local school-to-work programs should include the following elements:

- career guidance and preparation throughout elementary and secondary school;
- integrated applied and academic instruction;
- work experience;
- integrated school-based and work-based learning;
- activities to link school-based and work-based elements; and

[1] The results of this review were sent to the respective state staff for review and confirmation in spring 1994.

- linkages to jobs and further learning through postsecondary education.

States face significant challenges coordinating these new systems with existing programs and reform efforts in related areas. One challenge will be to coordinate state school-to-work systems with local activities so that all students have access to high quality programs without imposing uniformity on programs. Part of this challenge will be coordinating local efforts as schools and districts compete for access to area businesses.

A second challenge will be to integrate school-to-work transition and general education reform efforts. Educators have differing views about the inclusion of school-to-work transition as a central element in school reform.[2] At least three scenarios are possible:

- school-to-work transition becomes the basis for restructuring secondary schools, promoting school reform, and improving student performance;
- school-to-work transition becomes the basis for reforming education for students in the general track — the middle majority — with college preparation and special education left unscathed; or
- school-to-work transition results in a series of programs added to the general curriculum.

School-to-work activities also must be coordinated with reforms in state workforce development systems. To transform their current fragmented programs into flexible, high quality, lifelong learning systems, many states are creating more consumer-driven, results-oriented systems that are understandable and accessible to their customers, students workers, and employers. Current state initiatives that will require coordination with other school-to-work efforts include:

- the development of new performance management systems that include policy goals, performance standards, and information systems that relate to outcomes to be achieved by the school-to-work system;
- the streamlining of workforce development programs or agencies including many that will form the core of school-to-work systems; and
- the creation of Human Resource Investment Councils that include representatives from many of the agencies and businesses involved in state efforts to build school-to work systems.

State planners must simultaneously coordinate ongoing reform efforts and promote new approaches to preparing youth for work and further learning if they are to build coherent systems of school-to-work transition for all youth.

Current State Efforts

During the past five years, at least twenty-one states enacted school-to-work legislation to support the development of key elements of a school-to-work system. Nearly all states have made some effort to improve school-to-work opportunities for students. Table 1 shows the system elements that states have

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[2] A paper discussing the differing perspectives of education reformers, vocational educators, and workforce analysts written by Marc Tucker, executive director of the National Center on Education and the Economy, is available from the National Governors' Association.

substantially developed or implemented. Table 2 identifies the program models in each state and indicates whether or not this model is a statewide or state-sponsored initiative. Each of these aspects of school-to-work reform has been developed to varying degrees in the states. The following examples illustrate the kinds of initiatives that are currently underway.

State System Development

Nearly every one of the states has begun developing some elements of a state school-to-work system. System elements being addressed by states include occupational information systems, content and skill standards, performance-based assessments, portable skill certificates, and developing a statewide consensus on the goals and operation of school-to-work programs. The states with the most elements under development tend to be the urban, industrialized states such as **Michigan, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania**. The more sparsely populated rural states have the fewest elements underway. This may reflect the dominance of local governance in many rural states as well as the dominance of industrial and high technology metaphors in the current language of school-to-work reformers. Few of the current model programs reflect the types of industries prevalent in rural America and most are concentrated in metropolitan areas. As school-to-work systems develop, more attention must be given to program development in rural as well as inner city communities where there are fewer resources and less access to business and industry.

The states that report the most progress developing the state infrastructure to guide and support local programs tend to be members of one of a number of state coalitions (see Table 1). For example, **Indiana, Maine, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin** are part of the New Standards Project, which is sponsored by the National Center on Education and the Economy. Six states, **Connecticut, Iowa, Kentucky, Ohio, Washington, and West Virginia,** are participating in the National Conference of State Legislature's Investing in People program. With a substantial number of schools or districts in the High Schools That Work network, sponsored by the Southern Regional Education Board, **Georgia, Oklahoma, and West Virginia** also report substantial activity on school-to-work issues. Yet even in the most progressive states, most school-to-work system elements are either under development or partially implemented.

General education reform and school-to-work transition systems are tightly linked in a few states. During the past four years, **Oregon** has enacted four major pieces of legislation linking school reform, school-to-work transition for youth, and workforce development. The Oregon Education Act for the 21st Century calls for a comprehensive reform of education and related services for youth including expanding early childhood education, establishing new and higher learning standards, developing a performance-based assessment system, integrating health and social services, restructuring professional-technical education, implementing applied learning throughout the school system, developing youth apprenticeship programs, decentralizing decisionmaking to the local level, implementing certificates of initial and advanced mastery, and providing workplace learning for secondary students. Progress on each of these elements is measured through the Oregon Benchmarks, which include 272 different indicators of the quality of life for Oregonians. School-to-work programs are coordinated through regional workforce quality councils responsible for developing strategic plans for economic development.

The **Kentucky Education Reform Act** espouses the "philosophy that all students can achieve high academic standards when they learn through an applied approach rather than in the abstract." Under the career guidance program, every student takes a career choices course in eighth grade and develops a career transition plan beginning in the ninth grade.

New York has begun a statewide school restructuring process to develop "Career Pathways" for all noncollege-bound youth. This legislation provides guidance and funding for local schools and districts to develop pilot programs for school-to-work transition. Key elements of these pilot programs are the integration of applied and academic instruction, career guidance and preparation, elimination of the general track in secondary school, and partnerships with business, industry, and labor. One of the high school pilot programs has six career pathways for students to choose from: agriculture and natural resources; arts and communication; business, finance, and marketing; health, home, and recreation; social, human, and governmental services; and industry, technology, and engineering. Other programs are developing a variety of school-to-work activities including career portfolios for students to use to plan their courses and work experiences, shadow apprenticeships, performance-based assessments, schools-within-schools, student portfolios, and experiential learning.

Many states are struggling with how to create strong partnerships with business, industry, and labor that go beyond the traditional types of business involvement in schools. Most of the state applications mention the need to expand private sector involvement and include key business and labor organizations on advisory committees or task forces, but few states outline a specific strategy for reaching out to business and labor. Private sector involvement is a cornerstone of the new philosophy linking schools with economic development. The school-to-work systems being planned require broad private sector participation to ensure that school-to-work systems address the needs of the business community and the demands of the future marketplace as well as provide work-based opportunities for most students. More than two-thirds of the states indicated that they have achieved significant private sector involvement, but much of this is occurring at the local program level.

As stated in **Massachusetts'** application for a federal school-to-work planning grant, "While the state has an important role to play in mobilizing public opinion, setting standards, providing resources, and documenting results, the real operational planning for the Massachusetts' school-to-work system must take place among the business, education, and labor community and government leaders at the local and regional level." This shift in ownership for facilitating the transition from school to work for youth is evidenced in the membership of state planning committees and regional employment boards in which public and private sector representatives share authority for planning, implementing, and overseeing coordinated and comprehensive school-to-work systems. In their school-to-work planning efforts, Massachusetts is making use of existing business-education partnerships such as the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education, Associated Industries of Massachusetts, Massachusetts Business Roundtable, High Technology Commission, and CEO's for Fundamental Change in Education.

States have identified the public's concern and lack of understanding of the goals and strategies of school-to-work programs as one of the most persistent barriers to school-to-work reform. Parents are concerned that their children will not be able to go to college. Business leaders are concerned about the demands that will be placed on them to provide work experiences for students. Educators are concerned about demands being placed on them without sufficient professional development or resources. To help overcome this barrier, approximately one-third of the states included efforts to build public support for school-to-work activities into their planning grants. **Colorado, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Ohio** plan to hold regional meetings across the state to communicate with a broad cross-section of the public, including parents, educators, employers, and labor. **Michigan** will use focus groups to identify the interests, preferences and concerns of different constituencies. **West Virginia** will hold a statewide conference to communicate with educators, business and labor leaders, and community representatives

about state school-to-work activities. A number of other states plan to develop a statewide marketing strategy for school-to-work.

Many states are building their school-to-work efforts on vocational-technical education reforms encouraged under recent revisions to the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act. These reforms include requiring the development of comprehensive career guidance systems and statewide performance standards and measures. Inspired by earlier vocational education reforms, nearly two-thirds of the states have developed comprehensive career guidance systems that have been adopted widely by school districts across the state. For example, **Florida** has developed a long-range career planning and guidance system. Last year, more than 100,000 Florida eighth graders developed career plans. Florida's Blueprint for Career Preparation, which already is operating in sixty-four of the state's sixty-seven school districts, ensures that all students have a career/education/employment plan by the time they enter the ninth grade. This plan includes a detailed assessment of the support services needed to ensure student success. The **Hawaii** Department of Education has developed a career education plan for kindergarten through twelfth grade that incorporates career development activities into all levels of education. In addition, every high school in Hawaii and most intermediate schools are linked to a statewide computerized career information system.

Twenty-four states report significant progress toward developing and implementing skill standards. To guide these efforts, states are working closely with various industries to define the skills required in modern workplaces. **Georgia** has turned to industry and business representatives to cooperatively work with school administrators and teachers to develop specific proficiency standards and award successful students certificates and "industry-certified" status for a three-year period upon program completion. Currently, there are fifty-six approved curricula in home economics, marketing, business education, graphic arts, construction, forestry, and horticulture. Standards are currently being developed for health occupations. The standards apply to secondary vocational education programs that prepare students for entry-level jobs. **Wisconsin** has developed printing and finance standards in conjunction with its youth apprenticeship programs. **Ohio** has developed the Ohio Competency Analysis Profile that lists occupational, academic, and employability competencies and performance standards for forty-nine occupational areas. These lists, verified by business, industry, and labor, identify the knowledge and skills secondary school students and adults in postsecondary programs need when preparing for entry-level jobs in specific occupations.

Only a handful of state planning grant applications discuss current services that target out-of school youth or outline a vision that incorporates outreach to this population. Although the final version of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act requires that local partnerships provide access to all youth including out-of-school youth, the original version of the bill and the federal solicitation for planning grant applications were not as explicit. Hence, most states did not consider service to this population when developing their planning grant application, though all undoubtedly serve this population through the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) and other federal and state programs. Serving students who have dropped out of school poses a serious challenge to states and local partnerships. It is unclear how out-of-school youth will gain access to school-based and work-based programs. It is also unclear how JTPA and other community-based programs will be incorporated into the new school-to-work systems.

In summary, North Carolina's self-description contained in its federal application grant is typical: "While commendable local school-to-work programs are scattered across the state, no statewide, coherent, comprehensive school-to-work state system exists." By and large, states are on the front end of system development with most of the work still to be done.

School-to-Work Program Development

For decades schools and districts have been developing programs to prepare students for work. However, few of these programs have embraced all of the essential components of an effective school-to-work transition program. Among the components of an effective program are career guidance and preparation throughout elementary and secondary school, integrated applied and academic instruction, work experience, integrated school-based and work-based learning, activities to link school-based and work-based experiences, and linkages to jobs and further learning. The number and types of programs to facilitate the transition from school to work vary by state as well as the extent to which the state promotes or supports each model.

Vocational-technical education and cooperative education programs with a long history of state and federal sponsorship are the most universally available work-related programs in the states. Almost every local school district in the United States offers some vocational technical courses and more than 400,000 students (approximately 4 percent of the high school population) are involved in cooperative education every year. However, few vocational programs include structured work experiences or are integrated with academic courses. Although cooperative education programs provide work experience for students, typically they are not highly structured or linked to academic courses.

Over the past ten years many schools, districts, and states have developed program models that are more comprehensive than traditional vocational education programs. Technical preparation (tech prep), with substantial federal and state funding, has been implemented in every state. Some states, such as **Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, and Maryland,** have sponsored tech prep programs in every school district in the state (see Table 2). Tech prep is a 2 + 2 program linking vocational technical programs in the eleventh and twelfth grade to related associate degree programs in community colleges. Tech prep courses integrate academic and applied learning, especially in math and science, but do not typically contain extensive work-based learning as part of the program. Career academies and youth apprenticeships are both comprehensive program models that have been shown to be effective in increasing students' access to careers and further learning. Forty-three states have either career academies or youth apprenticeships at the local level, but these programs are few in number (see Table 2). For example, California has 60 career academies among its almost 1,200 school districts. Youth apprenticeship programs also are scattered in a few select high schools in each of the states using this strategy.

All the states plan to enhance and expand current local program models, such as tech prep, career academies, and cooperative education, to better prepare youth for work and to increase the number of students who are served. States also plan to incorporate missing work-based or school-based components to make these programs more effective. With a long history of encouraging local program development, **California** will continue to encourage local districts to adopt new program models and expand their existing school-to-work efforts. California has developed a variety of strong school-to-work programs including tech prep in more than half the state's high schools, sixty career academies, eight pilot youth apprenticeship programs, and a cooperative education program that links work experiences with classroom learning for students across the state. **New Mexico** stated explicitly that it will expand and enhance existing initiatives under its school-to-work plan rather than develop new strategies. **South Carolina** plans to use tech prep as the umbrella for reform, expanding the articulated programs linking high schools and community colleges to include work-based experiences. **Connecticut** has enhanced cooperative education as a competency-based program that uses experiential learning and offers students integrated classroom and work experience. The program provides work readiness, communication, team participation, and employability skills development as well as a skill development

related to occupational competencies. The supervised work experience is closely monitored to ensure adherence to a formal training plan designed by the employer, student, parents, and teacher. In 1994 there were fifty-four approved programs in the state. **Idaho**'s cooperative education program integrates classroom study and work through an approach that combines theory and career-related, paid work experience. Currently, this mode of instruction is being used within marketing and business education.

Thirteen states have undertaken major efforts to develop or incubate youth apprenticeship programs. In many instances, these initiatives are linked to registered apprenticeship programs. In addition, twenty-four states report having a few local youth apprenticeship programs. As part of tech prep high school students in **West Virginia** may participate in registered apprenticeship programs while completing their high school education at the local community college. **Maine**'s youth apprenticeship programs, which also are linked to the community colleges, are now operating in five regions in the state. **Pennsylvania** also is promoting youth apprenticeship programs and currently has enrolled more than 360 students — the largest state program to date — in youth apprenticeship programs in metalworking, manufacturing, electronics, and health professions.

Conclusion

Although at different points in the development of their school-to-work systems, it is clear from this review of state progress on school-to-work activities that states have accepted the challenge to build systems and programs that will facilitate the transition from school to work for most students. These new systems are being designed to raise standards for student performance and increase student motivation to meet those high standards by linking academic learning to practical problems. By building on existing programs, promoting innovative strategies, and including the key stakeholders in the design and implementation of these systems, states hope to build effective systems that will increase opportunities for all students.

The state plans indicate that state policymakers are willing to work within the framework presented in the federal legislation. However, as states and local schools and districts build and expand school-to-work programs, a wide range of issues must be addressed including:

- who will be served;
- how to group different occupations and the breadth of career majors;
- how tightly to link skill assessments and specific occupations;
- when specialization should take place;
- how to join pathways for further learning and work;
- whether new programs will supplant or restructure existing programs;
- how extensive work experiences need to be for all students;
- whether work experiences need to be in high performance workplaces or if current youth labor market jobs can be restructured to provide quality work experiences; and
- how to provide equal access for all youth.

The current policy atmosphere encourages states and local schools and districts to move ahead, experiment, and make adjustments as needed to deal with these issues as they arise. Because of federal legislation and mounting pressure to improve student outcomes and American economic competitiveness,

it is unlikely that states will wait until these issues are resolved before moving ahead with the planning and development of school-to-work systems and implementing comprehensive programs statewide.

Table 1
State School-to-Work System Elements

	STW* Legislation	Career Guidance System	Statewide General Assessment	Occupational Skill Assessments	Academic Content Standards	Student Performance Goals	Certificate of Initial Mastery	Eliminate General Track	Skill Standards	Significant Employer Involvement
Alabama		✓	✓		✓					
Alaska		✓			✓					
Arizona		✓		✓	✓				✓	✓
Arkansas	✓							✓		
California			✓		✓				✓	✓
Colorado			✓		✓	✓				✓
Connecticut	✓	✓				✓				
Delaware			✓		✓	✓				✓
Florida	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓
Georgia	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	
Hawaii		✓	✓			✓				
Idaho		✓	✓							
Illinois			✓	✓				✓	✓	✓
Indiana	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Iowa	✓		✓		✓				✓	✓
Kansas			✓		✓					
Kentucky		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Louisiana										
Maine	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Maryland		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓
Massachusetts	✓		✓		✓			✓	✓	✓
Michigan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Minnesota	✓				✓	✓				✓
Mississippi		✓		✓				✓		✓
Missouri		✓	✓		✓				✓	✓
Montana										✓
Nebraska		✓								
Nevada		✓				✓				

Table 1
State School-to-Work System Elements (*continued*)

	STW* Legislation	Career Guidance System	Statewide General Assessment	Occupational Skill Assessments	Academic Content Standards	Student Performance Goals	Certificate of Initial Mastery	Eliminate General Track	Skill Standards	Significant Employer Involvement
New Hampshire		✓			✓			✓		
New Jersey	✓	✓	✓						✓	✓
New Mexico		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
New York		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓
North Carolina			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
North Dakota										
Ohio		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
Oklahoma	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Oregon	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Pennsylvania	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Puerto Rico	✓	✓	✓					✓		✓
Rhode Island	✓	✓	✓							✓
South Carolina	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
South Dakota		✓	✓						✓	✓
Tennessee	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Texas	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓
Utah	✓	✓		✓			✓		✓	✓
Vermont		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
Virginia						✓				✓
Washington	✓		✓			✓		✓		✓
West Virginia					✓	✓		✓		✓
Wisconsin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Wyoming										

*STW = School-to-Work Transition.

✓ = The system element is substantially in place statewide or significant progress has been made toward implementing the system element.

Source: State applications for School-to-Work Opportunities grants and information provided by state staff.

Table 2
School-to-Work Programs By State

	Youth Apprenticeship	Career Academies	Technical Preparation	Jobs For America's Graduates*	High Schools That Work*
Alabama	✓		★		15
Alaska			★		
Arizona	✓	✓	✓	8	
Arkansas	★		★		18
California	★	★	★	25	
Colorado	✓	✓	★		
Connecticut	✓	✓	★		
Delaware		★	✓	27	5
Florida	✓	★	★	5	19
Georgia	★		★	17	62
Hawaii		✓	✓		
Idaho			★		
Illinois	★	✓	★		
Indiana	✓	✓	★		4
Iowa	★		★		
Kansas			★		5
Kentucky	✓	✓	★	20	34
Louisiana		✓	✓		20
Maine	★		★	30	18
Maryland	✓	✓	★		11
Massachusetts	✓	✓	✓	17	
Michigan	★	✓	★	2	
Minnesota	★		★		
Mississippi			★	33	65
Missouri	✓		✓	3	
Montana			★	9	
Nebraska		✓	✓		
Nevada	✓		★		
New Hampshire	✓		★	17	
New Jersey	★	✓	★		
New Mexico		✓	★		
New York	✓	★	★		
North Carolina	✓	✓	★		16
North Dakota			★		
Ohio	✓		★	113	
Oklahoma	★		★		100
Oregon	★		★		
Pennsylvania	★	✓	★	21	14
Puerto Rico			✓		
Rhode Island	✓	✓	★		
South Carolina	✓	✓	★	5+	12
South Dakota			★		
Tennessee	✓		★	68	25
Texas	✓		★		12
Utah	✓	★	✓		
Vermont	✓		✓	13	
Virginia	✓		★	5	26
Washington	✓	✓	★	5	1
West Virginia	★		★		60
Wisconsin	★		★		
Wyoming	✓		✓		

✓ = Local projects and small scale. ★ = Significant scale or state initiative.

* = Number of schools or districts.

Source: State applications for School-to-Work Opportunities grants and information provided by state staff.

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